



THE  
CONNOISSEUR.

By Mr. T O W N,

CRITIC and CENSOR-GENERAL.

---

NUMBER XLII.

---

THURSDAY, November 14, 1754.

---

— *Sermonum flet bonos, et gratia vivax.*

HOR.



FRIEND of mine lately gave me an account of a set of gentlemen; who meet together once a week under the name of *The ENGLISH CLUB*. The title with which they dignify their Society arises from the chief end of their meeting, which is to cultivate their Mother Tongue. They employ half the time of their assembling in hearing some of our best Classics read to them, which generally furnishes them with conversation for the rest of the evening. They have instituted annual festivals in honour of *Spenser, Shakespear, Milton, &c.* on each of which an oration, interspersed with encomiums on the *English* language, is spoken in praise of the author, who, in the phrase

P p p p

of

of the almanack, gives the red letter to the day. They have also established a fund, from which handsome rewards are allotted to those who shall supply the place of any exotic terms that have been smuggled into our language by homespun *British* words equally significant and expressive. An order is also made against importing any contraband phrases into the Club, by which heavy fines are laid on those who shall have any modish barbarisms found upon them: whether they be foreign words, antient or modern, or any cant terms coined by *The Town* for the service of the current year.

THE whole account which I received from my friend gave me great satisfaction: and I never remember any society that met together on such commendable principles. Their proceedings it must however be confessed are somewhat unfashionable; for the *English* Tongue is become as little the general care as *English* Beef, or *English* Honesty. Young gentlemen are obliged to drudge at school for nine or ten years in order to scrape together as much *Greek* and *Latin* as they can forget during their tour abroad, and have commonly at the same time a private master to give them *French* enough to land them with some reputation at *Calais*. This is to be sure very prudent as well as genteel. Yet some people are perverse enough to imagine that to teach boys a foreign language, living or dead, without at the same time grounding them in their Mother Tongue is a very preposterous plan of education. The *Romans*, though they studied at *Athens*, directed their studies to the benefit of their own country, and though they read *Greek*, wrote in *Latin*. There are at this day in *France* Academies established for the support and preservation of the *French* language: and perhaps, if to the present Professorships of *Hebrew* and *Greek*, there should be added a Professorship of the  
*English*

*English* language, it would be no disgrace to our learned Universities.

WHEN we consider that our language is preferable to most if not all others now in being, it seems something extraordinary that any attention should be paid to a foreign Tongue that is refused to our own, when we are likely to get so little by the exchange. But when we reflect further on the remarkable purity to which some late authors have brought it, we are still more concerned at the present neglect of it. This shameful neglect I take to be owing chiefly to these two reasons, the false pride of those who are esteemed men of learning, and the ridiculous affectation of our fine gentlemen, and pretenders to wit.

IN complaisance to our fine gentlemen, who are themselves the allowed standards of politeness, I shall begin with them first. Their conversation exactly answers the description which *Benedick* gives of *Claudio's*: "their words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes." These dishes too are all *French*; and I do not know whether their conversation does not a good deal depend on their bill of fare, and whether the thin meagre diet, on which our fine gentlemen subsist, does not in some measure take away the power of that bold articulation necessary to give utterance to manly *British* accents: whence their conversation becomes so "fantastical a banquet," and every sentence they deliver almost as heterogeneous a mixture as a *salmagundy*. A fashionable coxcomb now never complains of the vapours, but tells you that he is very much *ennuyé*.—He does not affect to be genteel but *degagée*—nor is he taken with an elegant simplicity in a beautiful countenance, but breaks out in raptures on a *je ne-sçay-quoi*, and a certain *naïveté*. In a word, his head as well as his heels is entirely

tirely *French*, and he is a thorough *petit maitre* in his language as well as behaviour. But notwithstanding all this, I do not know whether the conversation of our pretenders to wit is not still more barbarous. When they talk of *Humbug*, &c. they seem to be jabbering in the uncouth dialect of the *Huns*, or the rude gabble of the *Hottentots*: or if their words are at all allied to the language of this country, it probably comes nearest to the strange cant said to be in use among housebreakers and highwaymen; and if their jargon will bear any explanation, the curious are most likely to meet with it in a polite vocabulary lately published under the title of the *Scoundrel's Dictionary*.

MANY who are accounted men of learning, if they do not join with fops and coxcombs to corrupt our language, at least do very little to promote it, and are sometimes very indifferently acquainted with it. There are many persons of both our Universities who can decypher an old *Greek* manuscript, and construe *Lycophron extempore*, who scarce know the idiom of their own language, and are at a loss how to dispatch a familiar letter with tolerable facility. These gentlemen seem to think that learning consists merely in being versed in languages not generally understood. But it should be considered, that the same Genius which animated the Ancients has dispensed at least some portion of it's heat to later ages, and particularly to the *English*. Those who are really charmed with *Homer* and *Sophocles* will hardly read *Shakespeare* and *Milton* without emotion, and if I was inclined to carry on the parallel, I could perhaps mention as many great names as *Athens* ever produced.

*Multa poetarum veniet manus, auxilio quæ*

*Sit mihi.* — — — —

HOR.

The knowledge of *Greek*, *Latin*, &c. is certainly very valuable,

valuable, but this may be attained without the loss of their Mother Tongue: for these reverend gentlemen should know that languages are not like preferments in the Church, too many of which cannot be held together.

THIS great neglect of our own Tongue is one of the principal reasons that we are so seldom favoured with any publications from either of our Universities, which we might expect very often in consideration of the great number of learned men who reside there. The press being thus deserted by those who might naturally be expected to support it, falls to the care of a set of illiterate hirelings, in whose hands it is no wonder if the language is every day mangled, and should at last be utterly destroyed. Writing is well known to be at present as much a trade as any handicraft whatever, and every man who can vamp up any thing for present sale, though void of sense or Syntax, is listed by the booksellers as an author. But allowing all our present writers to be men of parts and learning (as there are doubtless some who may be reckoned so) is it probable that they should exert their abilities to the utmost, when they do not write for fame, like the Ancients, but as a means of subsistence. If *Herodotus* and *Livy* had sold their histories at so much a sheet, and all the other *Greek* and *Latin* Classics had written in the same circumstances with many modern authors, they would hardly have merited all that applause they so justly receive at present. The plays of *Sophocles* and *Euripides* might perhaps not have been much better than modern Tragedies; *Virgil* might have got a dinner by half a dozen *Town Eclogues*; and *Horace* have wrote Birth-day Odes, or now and then a lampoon on the company at the *Baia*.

A FALSE modesty is another great cause of the few publications by men of eminence and learning. However

Q q q q

equal



equal to the task, they have not sufficient confidence to venture to the press, but are rather guilty of wilful injustice to themselves and to the public. They are also ashamed of appearing among the common herd of authors. But the press, though it is often abused, should by no means be accounted scandalous or dishonourable. Though a learned and ingenious writer might not chuse to be mustered in the same roll with \_\_\_\_\_ or Mr. TOWN, yet we have a HOOKE, a BROWNE, an AKINSIDE, and many others in whose company it will be an honour to appear. I would not willingly suppose that they are afraid to hazard the characters they now maintain of being men of learning and abilities; for while we only take these things for granted, their reputations are but weakly established. To rescue our Native Language from the hands of ignorants and mercenaries is a task worthy those who are accounted ornaments of our Seats of Learning; and it is surely more than common ingratitude in those who eat the bread of literature to refuse their utmost endeavours to support it.

O